

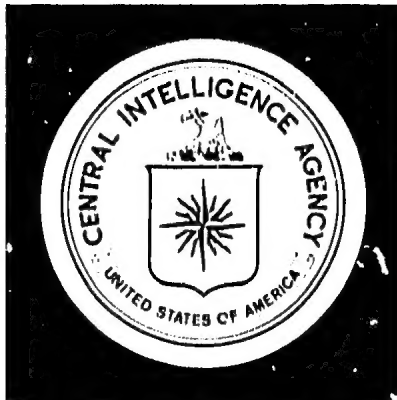
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DIRECTORATE OF  
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*Developments in Indochina*

State Dept. review  
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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA  
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SOUTH VIETNAM

Artillery exchanges continue in Quang Tri Province. The Communists are establishing new local administrations tied directly to the PRG, and there are reports from the delta that a new front group is being formed. Two of South Vietnam's well-established political parties have decided not to try to meet the requirements of the President's decree on political parties.

the Communists may have moved SAMs into the southern South Vietnam area.

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LAOS

The Pathet Lao are protesting US reconnaissance flights and are attempting to downgrade the committees set up to implement the terms of the peace agreement. Small-scale skirmishes continue in some areas.

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CAMBODIA

The military situation along Route 2 continues to deteriorate.

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SOUTH VIETNAMThe Military Situation

Artillery exchanges are continuing in Quang Tri Province as both sides maneuver along the Thach Han River. In Pleiku Province, the North Vietnamese used 130-mm. artillery and wire-guided AT-3 anti-tank missiles against South Vietnamese forces near the border, destroying two tanks. Sporadic fighting continues in the delta province of Dinh Tuong, with the bulk of Communist attacks directed against newly constructed or reconstructed government outposts. [REDACTED]

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Local PRG Administrations Reported

There are indications that the Communists are establishing some local administrations in the South under the aegis of the Viet Cong's Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG). One of these is a document captured in Thua Thien Province that outlines Viet Cong plans for a PRG hamlet administration in southern Phu Loc District. [REDACTED]

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If these reports are correct, they are among the first signs that the Viet Cong are setting up local administrations linked directly to the PRG. Since the PRG's formation in 1969, local "revolutionary committees" have sporadically cropped up, but no formal links between them and the PRG have ever been noted. In fact, administrative links continued to follow military lines in most areas.

These latest reports on the creation of PRG administrations could mean that the Communists are

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[redacted]

preparing to flesh out the PRG with some of the other attributes of a government, such as the delineation of people and territory it allegedly controls and the establishment of a capital. While the Vietnamese Communists have always touted the PRG as the "legitimate representative" of the South Vietnamese people, they have showed no great urgency up to now about acquiring any of the symbols that are normally associated with a legal governing apparatus.

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A New Communist Front?

There are further indications that the Communists have formed a new front in the South similar in name to the government's new popular front.

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[redacted]

nearly all the reports on the front are from the delta, and it is not clear if the group is to function nationwide. The Communists may feel they need an additional group to attract broader support, but the reported leaders of the new organization are the same ones who headed the unsuccessful "Alliance" the Communists launched during the Tet 1968 offensive.

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Status of Political Parties

Two of South Vietnam's most prominent political parties apparently will not meet the terms of the presidential decree on parties by the deadline of 27 March. [redacted] labor leader Tran Quoc Buu [redacted]

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[redacted] plans to form a new party based around his labor cadre, elements of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai sects, and possibly some Catholic groups. He says he expects the new party to be sufficiently organized to participate in the Senate elections scheduled for August.

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[REDACTED]

Buu claims that President Thieu had promised to help the FWP meet the terms of the decree on parties, and Buu is unhappy that Thieu did not follow through on this alleged commitment. Without such help, the FWP probably had no hope of qualifying. Moreover, even if Buu succeeds in gaining some new allies his chances of setting up a new party that could win the necessary 20 percent in the Senate elections would seem doubtful at best.

Nguyen Ngoc Huy, leader of the Progressive Nationalist Movement (PNM), believes that Thieu will not strictly apply the provisions of the decree for a while, giving existing parties a breathing spell. Huy told the US Embassy that the President will let the matter ride as long as he needs the good will of the parties for the "political struggle," but that once this need has passed, he can be expected to "crack down hard." The PNM leader, who has indicated strong opposition to the decree, says that despite his acceptance of a place on Saigon's delegation to the political talks with the Viet Cong, his party will still feel free to criticize government policies.

Huy indicated that the PNM is seeking allies among some of the same relatively small groups that Buu has approached: Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Catholic elements, as well as a faction of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party. Like Buu's party, the PNM would also seem to have little chance of qualifying if the terms of the decree are strictly enforced.

[REDACTED]

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SAMs Near South Vietnamese Border in Cambodia?

[REDACTED]

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The Communists could feasibly move SA-2s to the border region north of Saigon via the Lao pan-handle and supply routes through Cambodia, but further evidence will be needed before their presence could be considered confirmed. The Communists, however, have been trying to improve their air defense capability in this area. Aerial reconnaissance recently detected eight ZSU-57 self-propelled AAA vehicles north of An Loc, the capital of Binh Long Province, and photography from early March disclosed several possible 37-mm. AAA sites close to Xa Mat on the Tay Ninh Province - Cambodian border.

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LAOS

US Reconnaissance Protested

In a speech rebroadcast by Radio Pathet Lao on 8 March, chief Communist negotiator Phoumi Vongvichit claimed that US reconnaissance flights are in direct violation of the Vientiane peace agreement. Communist news commentators have accused the US of flying reconnaissance and bombing missions in violation of the agreement, but this is the first authoritative statement on recent US air activity. Phoumi's statement could be the opening shot in a major propaganda campaign, and the Communists could also be preparing to use the issue to further delay implementation of the Vientiane agreement.

The Military Situation

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Military activity on 12 March was limited to minor skirmishes southeast of the Plaine des Jarres and south of Thakhek in the panhandle. Small scale clashes are apt to continue in these areas as both sides seek to move into areas unoccupied at the time of the cease-fire.

Negotiating Impasse?

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A basic disagreement has halted the work of the two committees discussing the implementation of the peace agreement. The Communists now claim that the commissions are merely technical bodies tasked with elaborating the details of articles left vague in the peace agreement and have no real authority.

By denigrating the two commissions, the Communists are presumably setting the stage for another round of bargaining between Souvanna or his personal envoy Pheng Phongsavan and senior Communist negotiators. They have good reason to believe that Souvanna is more likely to make concessions behind closed doors.

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CAMBODIA

The Military Situation

The military situation along Route 2 south of Phnom Penh continues to deteriorate. On 12 March, government troops abandoned the outpost of Prey Sandek about seven miles south of Takeo. North of Takeo, they also abandoned the town of Chambak. The government now controls only about seventeen miles of the highway south of Phnom Penh. North of Takeo, the government controls only some 15 miles, and south of Takeo the only government presence is the small outpost at Phnom Den near the South Vietnamese border. Government operations to clear Route 2 from Phnom Penh to Takeo remain stalled.

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